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# Matter and Materiality in an Italian Reliquary Triptych

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## Abstract

*A late fourteenth-century painted triptych by the Sienese painter Bartolo di Fredi, now in a private collection in London, depicts the Virgin Mary with the Sienese patron saint Ansanus. It is one of several painted wooden tabernacles that originally incorporated saints' relics visibly into their surfaces. These tabernacles participate in a discourse around media, materiality, representation, and re-presentation. Through their combinations of bodily matter and varied artistic media, they raise questions and encourage thought about the relationships between different types of matter and among visibility, materiality, and reality. The tabernacles use a multiplicity of materials to represent the effects of other, more precious substances, such as painted and gilded wood for gold and colored glass for precious jewels. This seems to make an explicit devotional and theological point, highlighting the real value of the saints' relics in contrast with the apparent preciousness of the painted, gilded, and embellished surfaces. I suggest that paying attention to the materiality of the various elements of the tabernacles offers additional possibilities for consideration of their use and reception. I propose that the London tabernacle was created in Siena in the wake of the newly reinvigorated cult of relics that followed the acquisition by the hospital of Sta. Maria della Scala of a major collection of relics from Byzantium. At the same time, the tabernacle responds to the continuing cult of the Virgin in Siena and to the long-standing desire to link relics of the saints with images of the Virgin.*

A private collection in London houses a painted wooden triptych with wings that close over a central, gable-shaped panel (Fig. 1). The exterior is painted but carries no figurative decoration (Fig. 2). The wings open to show an image of the Annunciation, with the angel Gabriel on the left wing and the Virgin Mary on the right. Framing the central panel are thirteen circular cavities that once held relics. A half-length image of a young male martyr saint is painted in the triangular apex of the central panel. Below him is a pair of ivory panels carved in shallow relief, depicting the Adoration of the Magi on the left and the Crucifixion on the right.

This triptych is one of a group of reliquary tabernacles, now scattered around the world in public and private collections, that seem to have emanated from the workshops of Sienese artists in the mid- to late fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> All authors who have published on the London triptych attribute it to the Sienese artist Bartolo di Fredi. Nothing is known about its provenance or patronage. These issues will be discussed further below, but for the moment it suffices to describe this as a Sienese triptych by virtue both of its production by a Sienese artist and of its formal similarities to analogous tabernacles produced in Siena or by Sienese artists in the same period.

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1. Other Italian reliquary tabernacles exist, including several from northern Italy and Rome and a significant number produced in Umbria. Of the latter, eight are primarily executed in gilded glass. I will be analyzing these gilded-glass tabernacles in a separate study. Dillian Gordon, "A Sienese Verre Églomisé and Its Setting," *Burlington Magazine* 123, no. 936 (1981): 132, 148–53; and eadem, "The Mass Production of Franciscan Piety: Another Look at Some Umbrian verres églomisés," *Apollo* 140, no. 394 (1994): 33–42.

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## The London Triptych: Formal and Material Characteristics

The London triptych enshrined and presented a collection of saints' relics for visual contemplation. The outer edges of the triptych's central panel were once embedded with relics sealed behind glass or crystal disks, as is the case with other objects of this kind, such as a tabernacle in Baltimore attributed to Naddo Ceccarelli (Fig. 3) and a tabernacle in Cleveland (Fig. 4). In the London triptych only the hollowed-out cavities, painted blue, remain.<sup>2</sup> The traces of the raised gesso frames that once surrounded the transparent disks can be seen in circular areas of damage on the painted surface of the wings (Fig. 5). There is no remaining evidence of the relics that were once housed here. The male saint in the apex of the central panel looks up at the highest relic cavity, above his head, perhaps indicating that cavity as the site of one of his own relics.<sup>3</sup>

The painted decoration of the triptych in London has been attributed to the Sienese painter Bartolo di Fredi, whose active career encompassed the years from 1353 to his death in 1410. On the basis of the style of the painting and comparison with nine other objects of its type, the triptych can be dated to about 1370.<sup>4</sup> Gaudenz Freuler thought the London

triptych was created in the 1370s, and the person who catalogued the work when it was auctioned at Christie's, London, in 1994 gave it a date between 1368 and 1370.<sup>5</sup> Federica Siddi supported a date around 1368, whereas Alix de Torquat dated it later, to the 1380s.<sup>6</sup> Bartolo di Fredi is documented as a painter in Siena in 1355, and he reappears in documents relating to his living or working in Siena throughout his career.<sup>7</sup> He also received commissions in San Gimignano, Pienza, Volterra, and Montalcino, so it is by no means a foregone conclusion that this triptych was created for a Sienese patron. Nevertheless, the painting is reasonably included in the group of Sienese reliquary tabernacles by virtue of its production by a Sienese painter. Moreover, connections can be drawn between this triptych and the wider visual culture of trecento Siena and with possible Sienese patronage, as will be discussed below.

Embedded in the painted wooden structure of the triptych under discussion is an ivory diptych, making this Sienese

2. Because the object has not yet undergone a technical examination, it is impossible to know the age of the blue paint in the relic cavities. Other comparable objects, such as that by Naddo Ceccarelli in Baltimore (Fig. 3), deploy blue paint in the interior of the relic chambers. C. Griffith Mann suggests that this evokes "the celestial realm inhabited by the saints whose fragments were collected in the object." Mann, "Relics, Reliquaries, and the Limitations of Trecento Painting: Naddo Ceccarelli's Reliquary Tabernacle in the Walters Art Museum," *Word & Image* 22, no. 3 (2006): 251–59, at 253.

3. Although there is no consensus about the identity of the male saint, as will be discussed below, the most plausible suggestion is that he represents St. Ansanus, one of the patron saints of Siena.

4. Attributed to Pietro Lorenzetti, obverse of tabernacle with standing Virgin, 1340s, tempera on panel, 61 × 33 cm, private collection, Milan, and reverse of tabernacle with enthroned Redeemer, 1340s, egg tempera, ink(?), and tooled gold on poplar panel, 61.3 × 32.8 cm, Berenson Collection, Settignano; *Frame for a Portable Reliquary Icon*, 1347, gilded wood, modeled gesso, *verre églomisé*, glass cabochons, and relics, 66.6 × 51.2 × 25.3 cm (overall), Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978.26, Fig. 4; Circle of the Master of the Cappella Medici Polyptych, *Crucifixion*, mid-fourteenth century, tempera on wood, 47 × 25 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, 36.75; Naddo Ceccarelli, *Reliquary Tabernacle with the Virgin and Child*, mid-fourteenth century, tempera and gold leaf on wood panel with glass, paper, and relics, 62 × 43 × 9.4 cm, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.1159, Fig. 3; Lippo Vanni, *Reliquary Triptych with the Madonna and Child with Saints*, ca. 1350–59, tempera and gold leaf on wood with paper and relics, 49.4 × 45.4 × 6.2 cm (open), The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.750, Fig. 9; Lippo Vanni, *Saints Dominic,*

*Peter Martyr and Thomas Aquinas*, ca. 1360, tempera on poplar panel, 45.5 × 52.2 cm, Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca, 224 (91); Bartolo di Fredi, *Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, St. Ansanus, Adoration of the Magi, and the Crucifixion*, ca. 1370, tempera and gold leaf on wood with gold and polychromed ivory, thirteenth century, 35.5 × 46 × 3.4 cm (open), private collection, London (under discussion here); Cristoforo di Bindoccio(?) or Francesco di Vannuccio(?), *Tabernacle with Madonna of Humility and Standing Saints*, ca. 1380, tempera on wood, 74 × 38 cm, Museo Civico, Montepulciano, 71/131; Francesco di Vannuccio(?), *Tabernacle with Madonna of Humility*, ca. 1380, tempera on panel, 54 × 37.5 cm, Fondazione dei Monte dei Paschi di Siena, FMPS 101551 (2642); and Andrea di Bartolo, *Madonna of Humility, The Blessing Christ, Two Angels, and a Donor [obverse]*, ca. 1380–90, tempera on panel, 28.4 × 17 cm (painted surface), National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 1939.1.20.a and 1939.1.20.b. Even though no signs of relics or relic cavities currently survive on this last panel, technical examinations and X-rays have revealed that its lost engaged frame contained seven circular cavities for relics. Miklós Boskovits (1935–2011), "Andrea di Bartolo/Madonna of Humility, The Blessing Christ, Two Angels, and a Donor [obverse]/c. 1380/1390," *Italian Paintings of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, NGA Online Editions, <https://purl.org/nga/collection/artobject/160>. The earliest in this group of ten (attributed to Pietro Lorenzetti, Milan and Settignano) can be dated to the 1340s; the latest (Andrea di Bartolo, Washington, DC) to the 1380s–90s. This puts the London tabernacle among the later examples of the group.

5. Gaudenz Freuler, *Bartolo di Fredi Cini: ein Beitrag zur sienesischen Malerei des 14. Jahrhunderts* (Disentis, CH: Desertina, 1994), 507; Christie's, *Old Master Pictures, London, Friday, 22 April 1994* (London: Christie, Manson and Woods, 1994), 95, lot 57.

6. Federica Siddi, "Bartolo di Fredi (Siena, 1330–circa 1410)," in *Le arti a Siena nel primo Rinascimento: da Jacopo della Quercia a Donatello*, ed. Max Seidel (Milan: Motta, 2010), 364; and Alix de Torquat, "A Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary Attributed to Bartolo Di Fredi with Two Inserted Ivories" (MA diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 2007).

7. Patricia Harpring, *The Sienese Trecento Painter Bartolo di Fredi* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), 162.





Figure 1. *Bartolo di Fredi*, Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, St. Ansanus, Adoration of the Magi, and the Crucifixion, ca. 1370, *tempera and gold leaf on wood with gold and polychromed ivory*, fourteenth century, 35.5 × 46 × 3.4 cm (open), private collection, London (photo: author).

reliquary tabernacle unique. This unusual construction raises questions about materials and materiality, about iconography and meaning, about combinations of media, and about formal relationships between what we might think of as different categories of object, such as devotional paintings, altarpieces, and reliquaries. The work multiplies materials, by adding carved ivory to the painted and gilded triptych, but it also—like other Sienese reliquary tabernacles—visibly multiplies *matter*, by its inclusion of relics. In addition to the artistic materials they use, these tabernacles all include relics in or on the painted surface. Relics are important precisely because of their materiality, their identity as part of a holy body or as an object associated with a holy person or place. As a

synecdoche of the saint, the relic brings his or her material presence to earth in the tabernacle. In particular, through their combinations of bodily matter and varied artistic media, the reliquary tabernacles encourage thought about the relationships between different types of matter and among visibility, materiality, and reality.

Previous scholarly investigations of the London triptych, as of the others in the group, have tended to focus on form, style, and iconography. I intend here to take earlier observations in those areas as starting points for a study of the work that will also interrogate the materiality of this complex ensemble of images and media. Such an approach will further elucidate the material characteristics (both actual and per-



Figure 2. *Bartolo di Fredi*, Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, St. Ansanus, Adoration of the Magi, and the Crucifixion, ca. 1370, 35.5 × 23.6 cm (closed), private collection, London (photo: author). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

ceived) of the various elements and of the object as a whole. It will permit a richer consideration of its development in the wider context of the production of wooden reliquary tabernacles in Siena in the fourteenth century. These tabernacles combine the forms of several visual and material artifacts. In some respects they appear to be an outgrowth of the small-scale, painted devotional panels that became popular in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries in Italy; in others they seem to be based on Italian metalwork reliquaries. They offer both painted images and material remains of saints to the beholder's gaze and combine the functions of a devotional painting and a reliquary. They exploit the complex relationships between visibility and materiality in the beholder's interaction with the saints.<sup>8</sup> Considering the materiality of all the elements in the London triptych allows the connotations of the materials—both artists' media and the

8. I will be considering the whole group of Italian reliquary tabernacles as part of a further, book-length study.



Figure 3. *Naddo Ceccarelli*, Reliquary Tabernacle with the Virgin and Child, ca. 1350, tempera and gold leaf on wood panel with glass, paper, and relics, 62 × 43 × 9.4 cm, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.1159 (photo: The Walters Art Museum). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

saints' relics—to be investigated and the relationships between the different types of materials to be drawn out in new ways.

By reflecting on how these materials work in combination with one another and by investigating the triptych in the light of local devotional concerns, I move beyond previous attention given to form, style, and iconography to propose some scenarios for the use and reception of this object. Neither use nor reception has been much considered for the London triptych, except in general terms, partly because secure information about its patronage, ownership, and provenance (often sought by recourse to textual or documentary evidence) is largely unavailable. As I will show, however, the information provided by analysis of composition and iconography can be complemented by a consideration of the object's materiality and of the materiality of its constituent parts. In this widened field of analysis, the London triptych can be seen to perform a variety of presentational and representational actions. It appears to respond both to the long-standing Siennese devotion





Figure 4. Frame for a Portable Reliquary Icon, 1347, made in Siena, gilded wood, modeled gesso, verre églomisé, glass cabochons, and relics, 66.6 × 51.2 × 25.3 cm (overall), Cleveland Museum of Art, gift of Ruth Blumka in memory of Leopold Blumka, 1978.26 (photo: Cleveland Museum of Art). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

to the Virgin Mary and to a reinvigorated concern with the cult of relics in late trecento Siena. Attention to the relics embedded in its painted surface reveals that the London triptych can be understood not only as a small-scale devotional panel but also, in some respects, as a portable version of an altar, incorporating both images and relics as every altar-altarpiece ensemble does. With its particular multimedia identity, the London triptych also provides, among other things, the possibility for an advanced type of devotional meditation on different levels of reality and presence in various kinds of material representation. Although this article is largely a case study of a single object, it suggests that adding a consideration of materiality to the standard analytic repertoire of form, style, and iconography would benefit studies of the visual and material culture of the Middle Ages much more widely.

### *Materiality in Art History*

Materiality, as a theoretical framework, has come to the fore fairly recently in art historical studies and has arguably

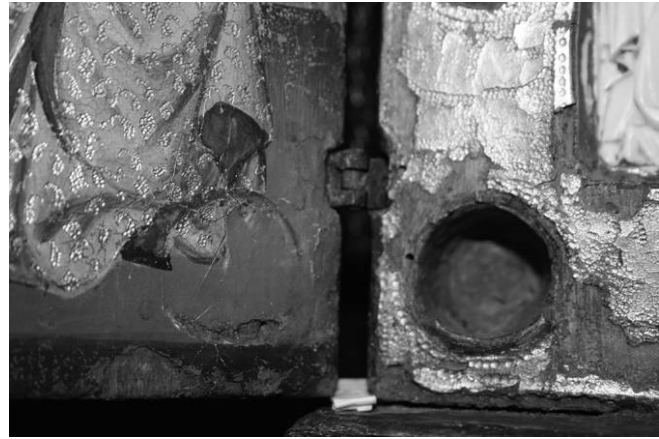


Figure 5. Bartolo di Fredi, Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, St. Ansanus, Adoration of the Magi, and the Crucifixion, detail of Fig. 1 showing the angel of the Annunciation with damage caused by offset gesso frame for the glass or crystal cover of a relic chamber(?), private collection, London (photo: author). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

had a particular resonance in medieval art history.<sup>9</sup> Karen Overbey and Benjamin Tilghman charted the emergence of materiality in the world of academic medieval art history and noted that recently, “there have been new noises around medieval art. In conference papers, in journal issues, in symposia: there is a new fervor for the objecthood of medieval art.” Further, they pointed out that these “new noises” were coming from “work that takes materiality as its starting point, rather than artists, patrons, or beholders.”<sup>10</sup> This current in medieval art history, they say, was a confluence of two streams: “new materialist” approaches, such as thing theory and object-

9. The year 2012 was pivotal for the concept of materiality in art history. A critical mass of conference sessions and papers led to a fascinating spread of publications in the following years. At the College Art Association annual conference that February, the International Center of Medieval Art sponsored a session titled “*Res et significatio*: The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages,” which developed into a special issue of *Gesta* edited by Lisa Reilly with Libby Parker, Aden Kumler, and Christopher R. Lakey (*Gesta* 51, no. 1 [2012]). Later that spring, at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo, the ICMA sponsored two sessions on active objects: “Active Objects I: Optics and Transparency” and “Active Objects II: Agency and Phenomenology,” organized by Karen Eileen Overbey and Benjamin C. Tilghman, founding members of the Material Collective. This group of scholars, mainly medieval art historians, has done much in recent years to bring concepts of materiality and material studies of art to the fore and keep them moving forward. See <http://thematerialcollective.org>. Papers from the Kalamazoo sessions appeared in 2014 as an issue of *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art*, <http://differentvisions.org/four/>.

10. <http://differentvisions.org/active-objects-an-introduction>.

oriented ontology,<sup>11</sup> which had been manifest in material culture studies and archaeology for a few years before materiality hit art history; and recent work in medieval art that had focused specifically on materials and objects.

As Aden Kumler and Christopher Lakey put it, “Historians of medieval art and architecture, as well as medieval archaeologists, have traditionally been sensitive to the material constitution and character of our chosen objects of study.”<sup>12</sup> In fact, it could be argued that art history as a whole is especially concerned with materiality, since its primary source matter is objects. The concentration on surviving objects in most areas of the discipline “materializes” art history in a very particular way that is also arguably different from areas of scholarship where texts are the focus (although materiality has also been a topic in textual criticism of late,<sup>13</sup> and in musicology).<sup>14</sup> Various currents in art historical scholarship, such as the return to the object and technical art history, have also helped set the scene for the fairly recent emergence of materiality as a bona fide methodological framework. This framework was validated for art history partly by the appearance of the term in a multiauthor “Notes from the Field” feature in the *Art Bulletin* in 2013.<sup>15</sup> Scholars in many fields, then, are increasingly finding a study of the material characteristics of objects and the appearance and connotations of materials to be a fruitful avenue for assessing visual and material culture and, indeed,

culture more widely. Using a materially inflected analysis of the London triptych, I consider the theological, devotional, and aesthetic possibilities conferred on this object by the material characteristics of its components. I examine the juxtapositions of its media and materials, focusing especially on the combination of varied media and artists’ materials with the holy matter of relics.

### *A Group of Sienese Reliquary Tabernacles*

Ten examples survive of a similar type: painted wooden panels with relics embedded in their surfaces, produced by Sienese artists and/or for Sienese patrons. They can now be found in museums and private collections across Europe and the United States.<sup>16</sup> These reliquary tabernacles take different forms: single-panel tabernacles (6), a wing of a diptych (1), and triptychs (3). The iconography is varied as well.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, despite their divergent forms and iconographies, these objects can be identified as a group and have been treated as such several times in previous scholarship. In 1979 Eliot Rowlands proceeded from the single-panel tabernacle by Naddo Ceccarelli in the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (Fig. 3), to examine in particular two other Sienese trecento examples of that type, one whose constituent parts are split between two collections in Italy (Milan and Settignano) and the other in Montepulciano.<sup>18</sup> In 1995–97 Dagmar Preisling produced an extensive catalogue of panels containing relics, considering seventy-four examples from across Italy, Byzantium, and northern and central Europe, arranged by place of production.<sup>19</sup> She

11. Thing theory is a branch of critical theory that originated largely in the work of Bill Brown, a professor of American culture at the University of Chicago. It examines the status of objects and considers the relationship between human subjects and objects, and it is especially concerned with the ways that objects become “things” when they cease to perform their normal functions and become “noticeable” to human subjects as “things.” Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001): 1–22; idem, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and idem, ed., *Things* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Object-oriented ontology is a school of thought that rejects the privileging of human existence over the existence of nonhuman objects.

12. Aden Kumler and Christopher R. Lakey, “*Res et significatio*: The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages,” *Gesta* 51, no. 1 (2012): 1–17, at 1.

13. E.g., Graham Allen, Carrie Griffin, and Mary O’Connell, eds., *Readings on Audience and Textual Materiality* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2011); and Jutta Eming, Ann Marie Rasmussen, and Kathryn Starkey, eds., *Visuality and Materiality in the Story of Tristan and Isolde* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

14. For medieval music studies, see esp. Emma Dillon, *Medieval Music-Making and the “Roman de Fauvel”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); eadem, *The Sense of Sound: Musical Meaning in France, 1260–1330* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); and eadem, “Unwriting Medieval Song,” *New Literary History* 46, no. 4 (2015): 595–622.

15. Martha Rosler et al., “Notes from the Field: Materiality,” *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 11–37.

16. See note 4 above.

17. The central fields of the three triptychs feature the Virgin enthroned (Walters, 37.750); a standing image of St. Dominic (Pina-coteca Vaticana); and the half-length figure of a male saint above a pair of inserted ivory panels (the London triptych under investigation here). The main image fields of the six single-panel tabernacles present one example of a Virgin enthroned, with a lost Crucifixion on the reverse (Cleveland, with, originally, a gilded-glass panel now in Cambridge [Fitzwilliam Museum, M.56 and A-1904] in the frame); two examples of the standing Virgin (Walters, 37.1159, and Settignano, originally with the enthroned Redeemer now in a private collection in Italy on its reverse); and three examples of the Madonna of Humility (Monte dei Paschi, Siena; Museo Civico, Montepulciano, with male saints below; and Washington, DC, with a Crucifixion on the reverse). The diptych wing (Detroit) depicts the Crucifixion; it probably once had a Marian or Infancy of Christ image, such as the Adoration of the Magi, in the opposite left wing.

18. Eliot W. Rowlands, “Sienese Painted Reliquaries of the Trecento: Their Format and Meaning,” *Konsthistorisk tidskrift* 48, no. 3 (1979): 122–38.

19. Dagmar Preisling, “Bild und Reliquie: Gestalt und Funktion gotischer Reliquientafeln und -altären,” *Aachener Kunstblätter* 61 (1995–97): 13–84.

dealt with eight of the Sienese examples but was apparently unaware of the London triptych, which was virtually unknown before it was sold at Christie's in 1994. In 2006 C. Griffith Mann published an article in which he, like Rowlands, focused first on the tabernacle in Baltimore and then considered that object in the context of the other Sienese single-panel tabernacles.<sup>20</sup> Because he was concentrating on the single-panel format typified by Naddo Ceccarelli's work, Mann did not include the London triptych as part of his main group, although he mentioned and illustrated it.<sup>21</sup> In 2007 the London triptych received its own detailed study in the form of a Courtauld master's dissertation by Alix de Torquat.<sup>22</sup> More recently, Virginia Brilliant, studying the reliquary tabernacle frame now in Cleveland (Fig. 4), dealt with the same group of single-panel tabernacles as had Mann but did not mention the triptych in London.<sup>23</sup>

The London reliquary tabernacle has also been featured in a number of exhibitions in recent years, including "Treasures of Heaven"<sup>24</sup> and "Da Jacopo della Quercia a Donatello: le arti a Siena nel primo rinascimento."<sup>25</sup> Although it has become reasonably well known among scholars of central Italian trecento art, it has not yet received detailed attention in terms of its materiality, the links between materiality and meaning, or reception.

20. Mann ("Relics, Reliquaries, and the Limitations of Trecento Painting," 251) mentions seven objects of the same general type: Walters, 37.1159; Cleveland, 1928.26; New York, private collection; Berenson Collection, Settignano; Museo Civico, Montepulciano; Monte dei Paschi, Siena (on loan to The Cloisters, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, at the time of Mann's writing); and a fifteenth-century Florentine example by Fra Angelico, the so-called *Madonna delle Stelle* in the Museo San Marco, Florence. In this group of seven he seems to count two panels individually that were formerly elements of the same double-sided tabernacle (the enthroned Redeemer panel formerly in New York, now in a private collection in Milan, and the standing Virgin in the Berenson Collection in Settignano), noting, however, that they were originally part of the same object.

21. On the same principle, Mann did not deal with two triptychs by Lippo Vanni (the Dominican triptych in Rome and the one in Baltimore).

22. De Torquat, "Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary."

23. Virginia Brilliant, "A Framework for Devotion in Trecento Siena: A Reliquary Frame in the Cleveland Museum of Art," *Peregrinations* 4, no. 3 (2014): 66–94, <http://digital.kenyon.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1090&context=perejournal>. Like Mann, Brilliant appears to have counted the New York and Settignano panels as two separate objects in this total of seven.

24. "Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe," Cleveland Museum of Art, 17 October 2010–17 January 2011; Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum, 13 February–15 May 2011; London, British Museum, 23 June–9 October 2011.

25. Siena, Complesso Museale Sta. Maria della Scala, 26 March–1 July 2010.

## The London Triptych: Iconography

The Sienese identity of this object is universally accepted by all scholars who have published on it. Iconography, as well as form and style, has led writers to link the London triptych with Siena; in particular, its combination of the young male saint and the Annunciation has encouraged comparisons with an important Sienese altarpiece. Mann argues that the London triptych's Annunciation draws on the visual language of the Annunciation altarpiece carried out in 1333 by Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi for the altar in Siena Cathedral dedicated in honor of St. Ansanus (Figs. 1 and 6).<sup>26</sup> Bartolo di Fredi's style and composition are often linked with those of Simone Martini, and the angel of the Annunciation in the London triptych can usefully be compared with Simone's St. Ansanus altarpiece.<sup>27</sup> Yet similarities can be drawn not just with the Siena Annunciation altarpiece but also with Simone's angel of the Annunciation, now in Washington, DC (Fig. 7).<sup>28</sup> Bartolo's angel picks up the gestures and positions of the angel's hands from the cathedral Annunciation, but the arrangement of the arms and legs, with one knee raised and a hand resting on the knee, owes more to the Washington angel. Simone Martini is not the only Sienese painter from earlier generations from whom Bartolo di Fredi took inspiration, however. His Annunciate Virgin in the London triptych seems to depend just as much on the frescoed Annunciation by Ambrogio Lorenzetti at the former Cistercian abbey of San Galgano at Montesiepi (Fig. 8).<sup>29</sup> The London triptych was, therefore, formed in the crucible of Bartolo di Fredi's Sienese training and inspired by the work of several of his Sienese forerunners.

While it is quite common for representations of the angel of the Annunciation and the Annunciate Virgin to appear on

26. Hereafter, only Simone Martini will be named as the artist of this altarpiece. C. Griffith Mann, "Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, St. Ansanus, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Crucifixion," in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. Martina Bagnoli et al. (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art; Baltimore: Trustees of the Walters Art Museum; London: British Museum, 2010), 204–5, cat. no. 121.

27. For this altarpiece, see Andrew Martindale, *Simone Martini* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988), 41–43, 187–90, no. 12.

28. Ibid., no. 42; and <https://www.nga.gov/Collection/art-object-page.357.html>. This panel once formed the left wing of a diptych with the Annunciate Virgin, which is now in the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, 284.

29. Eve Borsook, with technical notes by Leonetto Tintori, *Gli affreschi di Montesiepi* (Florence: EDAM, 1968), 27–32, 88 (pl. 44), 91 (pl. 47), 93 (pl. 49). The pose of the Virgin in Bartolo's Annunciation, with hands crossed over her chest and head bowed in the classic gesture of humble acceptance, is closely related to the final version of Ambrogio Lorenzetti's Montesiepi fresco.





Figure 6. *Simone Martini and Lippo Memmi, Annunciation, signed and dated 1333, tempera and gold leaf on wood, 184 × 114 cm (central panel), 105 × 48 cm (side panels), originally Siena Cathedral, now Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 451–453 (photo: author). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.*

the wings of triptychs like this one, the Annunciation in London is presented in large scale; it occupies more space in the wings than this episode normally does. It is more usual for the Annunciation to occupy the tips of the interior wings in such triptychs, as in an example by Lippo Vanni at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (Fig. 9), rather than the whole of the wing.<sup>30</sup> Simone Martini's St. Ansanus altarpiece fea-

tures the Annunciation in the central field and the standing figure of St. Ansanus in a left-hand subsidiary field (Fig. 6). The London triptych's painted imagery reverses that arrangement of figures, placing the Annunciation in the wings and a saint in the upper center, with the ivory panels depicting the Adoration of the Magi and the Crucifixion beneath him. However, the Annunciation is still signaled as important in the London triptych by virtue of its unusually large scale (Fig. 1). This serves to focus the viewer's mind on the moment

30. See numerous other examples in Victor M. Schmidt, *Painted Piety: Panel Paintings for Personal Devotion in Tuscany, 1250–1400* (Florence: Centro Di, 2005), 44, 110, 113, 123, 168, 211, 246, 249, inter alia. De Torquat ("Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary,"

31) also noted the usual placement of the Annunciation in the tips of triptych wings.



Figure 7. *Simone Martini, The Angel of the Annunciation, ca. 1330, tempera on poplar panel, 29.5 × 20.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1939.1.216 (photo: National Gallery of Art). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.*

when “the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us” (John 1:14). The Virgin, as in many Annunciation images of the period, holds a book, from which she was, by tradition, supposed to have been reading when the Annunciation took place.<sup>31</sup> The book in the London triptych is open, resembling Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s Annunciation for the Ufficio della Gabella, the Sienese tax office, more than it does Simone Martini’s St. Ansanus altarpiece, in which the book is closed (Figs. 6 and 10).

31. Some traditions, such as those stemming from Bible commentaries by Ambrose and Bede, stated that she had been reading a prophecy that a virgin would conceive and bear a son. Aelred of Rievaulx, the twelfth-century Cistercian theologian, suggested in a sermon that Mary was reading the book of Isaiah at the time of the Annunciation. E. Rozanne Elder, ed., *Mary Most Holy: Meditating with the Early Cistercians* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2003), 7.

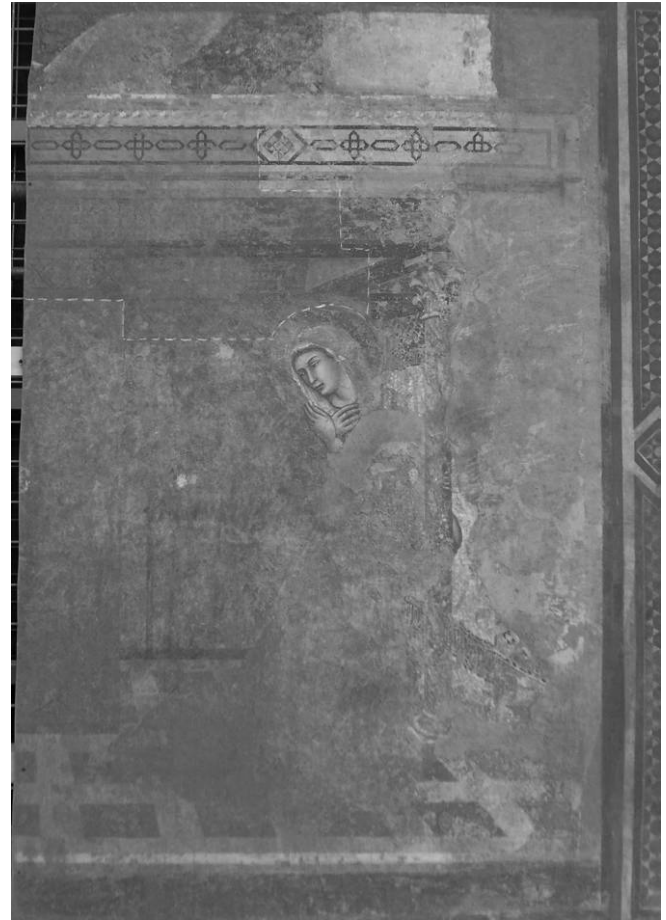


Figure 8. *Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Annunciation, 1340s, fresco, San Galgano, Montesiepi (photo: author). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.*

Thus words, and the Word, and the Word made visible—although the words on the book of the London Virgin are unreadable—seem to be important for the meaning of the triptych. The motif of the Virgin’s book visually reinforces not only the fact that the Incarnation had long been heralded by the prophets but also the idea of the connection, at the very moment of Christ’s Incarnation, of Word and flesh and of transformation from one to another. In fact, ideas of transformation, and relationships between one form of matter or material and another, are fundamental in these tabernacles, in which images of saints in their mortal form are placed alongside relics. The relics of the saints abide here on earth, while their purified souls are in heaven, waiting, like all humanity, for the Last Judgment. At that point souls will be reunited with their physical bodies, and the whole material and divine world will be transformed into the perfectness of the New Heaven and the New Earth. Thus, the presence of different types of matter alongside one another in this triptych, and others like it, can be seen to resonate with these ideas of change.



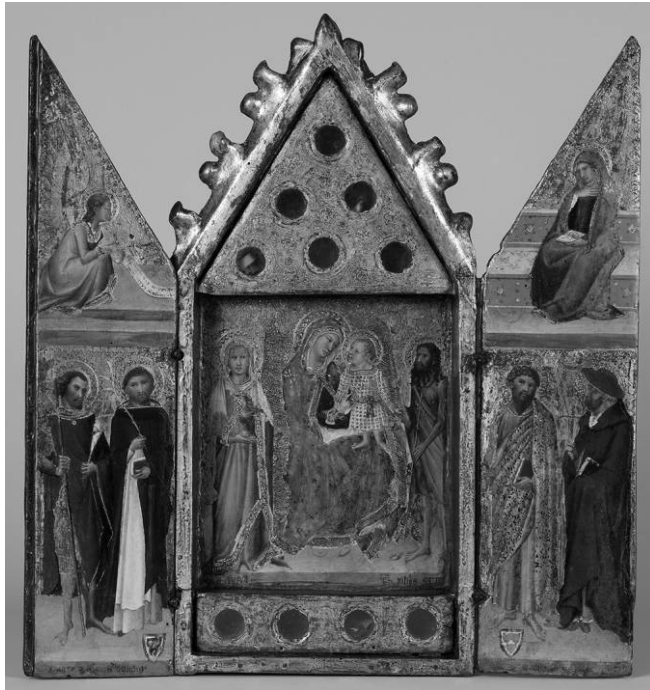


Figure 9. Lippo Vanni, Reliquary Triptych with the Madonna and Child with Saints, ca. 1350–59, tempera and gold leaf on wood with paper and relics, 49.4 × 45.4 × 6.2 cm, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 37.750 (photo: The Walters Art Museum). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

The maker of the London triptych has placed the male saint prominently at the top of the central field (Fig. 1), rather than in the subsidiary field in which Ansanus is positioned in the Siena Cathedral altarpiece. The Christie's sale catalogue entry for this work suggests that the saint may be Ansanus and notes that his relics might have been included in the triptych.<sup>32</sup> Other scholars, including Freuler, De Torquat, and Mann, have agreed with this identification.<sup>33</sup> Siddi is uncertain, noting that the saint in the London triptych does not carry the Sienese banner, the *balzana*;<sup>34</sup> he carries a book instead. The

32. "[T]he compartments in the main panel originally contained the relics of the male martyr saint depicted." Christie's, *Old Master Pictures*, 95. There had been relics of St. Ansanus in Siena since the twelfth century. Ansanus was martyred in 304 during the reign of Emperor Diocletian. He was buried at a spot near the river Arbia, a few miles from Siena. The site of his burial had been the center of a long-running dispute between Siena and Arezzo during the eighth century. His relics were brought into the city and interred in an altar in the Duomo in 1170. Diana Webb, *Patrons and Defenders: The Saints in the Italian City-States* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996), 37.

33. Freuler, *Bartolo di Fredi Cini*, 506–7; De Torquat, "Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary," 32; and Mann, "Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation."

34. Siddi, "Bartolo di Fredi," 364.



Figure 10. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Annunciation, signed and dated 1344, tempera and gold leaf on wood, 127 × 120 cm, originally Consistory Hall, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, now Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena, 88 (photo: author). See the electronic edition of *Gesta* for a color version of this image.

presence or absence of the banner attribute is not conclusive in itself: while St. Ansanus holds a banner in the Siena Cathedral altarpiece and in another painting also by Simone Martini in New York (ca. 1326),<sup>35</sup> he does not do so in Simone's Palazzo Pubblico *Maestà* (1315) or in Duccio's Siena Cathedral *Maestà* (1311).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Ansanus could carry a variety of attributes, including a heart or entrails or a baptismal cup.<sup>37</sup> The saint in the London triptych has the youthful features and the short bobbed hairstyle with curls at the bottom that Ansanus exhibits in the cathedral altarpiece, in the 1315 *Maestà*, and in the New York panel. He is dressed in the same way as St. Ansanus in the cathedral altarpiece, in a red mantle with gold trim at the neck. While the identity of the saint in the London triptych cannot be established with certainty, his physical appearance makes it very likely that this young male martyr is meant

35. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, New York, 1975.1.13, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/458953>.

36. Martindale, *Simone Martini*, 15–17, 204–9, pls. 2, 4; and John White, *Duccio: Tuscan Art and the Medieval Workshop* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1979), chap. 6 and pl. 17.

37. Although he had been born a Roman, Ansanus was venerated as "the baptizer" of Siena. For his various attributes in Tuscan painting, see George Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Tuscan Painting* (Florence: Sansoni, 1952), 60–61.



to be Ansanus. As one of Siena's four patron saints, Ansanus featured in prominent images depicting the patron saints of Siena during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, up to the later years of the fourteenth century, when the London triptych was being produced.<sup>38</sup>

Although we have no documentary evidence to suggest who might have commissioned the London triptych, it seems likely that the work was created for a Siennese patron who was aware of the Siena Cathedral altarpiece with St. Ansanus and the Annunciation, perhaps for a private chapel or as a portable altarpiece. The only reliquary tabernacle of this sort for which we do have secure patronage information, the Cleveland tabernacle, bears an inscription that dates it to 1347 and gives us the name of the patron: Mino di Cino of the Cinughi family of Siena (Fig. 4). Two further heraldic panels provide a link with the Siennese hospital and orphanage, the Ospedale di Sta. Maria della Scala. Mino di Cino Cinughi was the rector of Sta. Maria in the 1340s, and it seems likely that he commissioned this tabernacle as a gift for the Ospedale.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, we can be confident in suggesting that Siennese patrons in the 1360s and 1370s had at least one model (and probably more) of a previous Siennese commissioner who requested a tabernacle that combined painted images and relics.

### *Form and Meaning: Reliquaries with Panels, or Panels with Relics?*

Earlier studies of these Siennese tabernacles have linked some of their formal features—as well as their functions as reliquaries—explicitly with Siennese metalwork reliquaries. Mann suggested that the processional tabernacles in the group, such as the one by Naddo Ceccarelli in Baltimore (Fig. 3), might be best understood as painted versions of the now-lost reliquary of San Galgano, dated about 1315–20, formerly in the parish church in Frosini, near Montesiepi.<sup>40</sup> This reliquary featured twenty-three circular reliquary chambers in a rectangular ga-

bled frame. Beneath the chambers were translucent enamels featuring scenes from the life of St. Galganus. Like the painted reliquary tabernacles, the San Galgano reliquary displayed the relics for viewing, alongside images, rather than enshrining them in a decorated box or casket, hidden from sight.<sup>41</sup> In earlier reliquary caskets, where the relics themselves were entirely hidden inside and could not normally be seen, the exterior of the reliquary had to speak materially of the splendor of the relics within. These exteriors had to indicate the real presence of the saint's relics but also hint at the equally real presence of the saint in heaven.<sup>42</sup> Gold and other precious metals were chosen both because they were expensive and valuable and because they were thought to be pure and incorruptible; they could therefore symbolize the incorruptible flesh of the saints.<sup>43</sup> Jewels, stones, polished crystal or glass, and other inserted decorative objects were all used to enhance the splendor of the exterior of the object and to indicate by association the preciousness of the relics enclosed within, at the same time alluding symbolically to the Heavenly City of Jerusalem (Rev. 21:18–21).

In the San Galgano reliquary, however, and in the single-panel type of reliquary tabernacle such as the ones in Baltimore and Cleveland, the relics are no longer in any real sense “inside” the reliquary but are instead displayed on its surface: it is almost as though these are reliquaries turned inside out (Figs. 3–4).<sup>44</sup> The surfaces of the tabernacles display the relics

38. These included the stained-glass oculus window at the east end of the Duomo, dated about 1288–89, as well as Duccio's *Maestà*, Simone Martini's *Maestà*, and the Siena Cathedral Annunciation altarpiece. Later in the fourteenth century Ansanus continued to attract patronage: a bell for the cathedral made in 1382 was named “Santo Sano,” and a silver figure of him was placed in the cathedral the following year.

39. Brilliant, “Framework for Devotion in Trecento Siena,” 71–72; and Luciano Banchi, *I rettori dello Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala di Siena* (Bologna: Fava e Garagnani, 1877), 42–45.

40. Mann, “Relics, Reliquaries, and the Limitations of Trecento Painting,” 259n4. For this reliquary, see Elisabetta Cioni Liserani, “‘Maestro del Reliquiario di Frosini,’ 1315–20,” in *Il Gotico a Siena: miniature, pitture oreficerie, oggetti d'arte; Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, 24 luglio–30 ottobre 1982* (Florence: Centro Di, 1982), 117–21, cat. no. 34.

41. Christof L. Diedrichs, *Vom Glauben zum Sehen: die Sichtbarkeit der Reliquie im Reliquiar; ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Sehens* (Berlin: Weissenensee, 2001); and Martina Bagnoli, “The Stuff of Heaven: Materials and Craftsmanship in Medieval Reliquaries,” in Bagnoli et al., *Treasures of Heaven*, 137–47, at 140–43. It is important to note that even though a dominant narrative in studies of the cult of saints, relics, and reliquaries implies that all reliquaries developed in the direction of making the relics within more visible, this is true only in certain periods and regions. As Robyn Malo points out, some types of reliquaries continued to occlude the relics within. Malo, *Relics and Writing in Late Medieval England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 10.

42. Cynthia Hahn, “The Voices of the Saints: Speaking Reliquaries,” *Gesta* 36, no. 1 (1997): 20–31; eadem, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400–circa 1204* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 31; and Erik Thunø, “The Golden Altar of Sant’Ambrogio in Milan: Image and Materiality,” in *Decorating the Lord's Table: On the Dynamics between Image and Altar in the Middle Ages*, ed. Søren Kaspersen and Thunø (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), 63–78. I am grateful to Linda Safran for drawing this latter study to my attention.

43. Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, 26, and chap. 2.

44. Robert Branner makes a parallel point in relation to the Sainte-Chapelle, the reliquary chapel built in Paris by King Louis IX in the 1240s: “The extensive gilding of the masonry, the backgrounds of the frescoes, which resemble enamels and chased gold, the angels in

prominently alongside painted imagery, *pastiglia* work, inserted ivories or gilded glass, and inserted crystals, glass, or jewels. The relics are thus deployed decoratively, in part, as an element of the aesthetic arrangement of the reliquary itself. They are used as if they were an additional artistic medium, as visible adornments on the surface of the object rather than hidden away inside. In fact, perhaps we should think of objects like these, composed of elements in different artistic media that incorporate material embellishments of other kinds (gilding, *pastiglia* work, embedded jewels, glass, stones, crystals, and relics), not merely as multimedia objects but as “multimaterial” or even “multimatter” objects.

These tabernacles, then, with relics placed on the surface of the reliquary, function as a beautiful case of aesthetic and functional circularity. The relics take the place of the embedded jewels and stones that appeared on the outside surfaces of earlier reliquaries. Medieval religious culture forged a strong conceptual link between jewels and relics, stones and bones.<sup>45</sup> Hagiographic texts often compared the bones of saints and martyrs to precious gems, as in the Lives of St. Polycarp, St. Agnes, St. Eligius (himself a maker of reliquaries), St. Aelred of Rievaulx, and others.<sup>46</sup> Previously a reliquary would have had precious stones on its exterior; now the precious bones took their place on the surface, where they speak confidently of themselves without needing to be represented by gorgeous jewels. The viewer of a reliquary tabernacle that carried such relic chambers visibly around its edges would have been reminded to think of these relics—visually rather uncharismatic in themselves—as akin to jewels, precious beyond measure.

Visual sources as well as textual ones might also have encouraged the development of tabernacles with central painted

images and relic chambers around the margins. Well before the date of the London work, painters in Siena and Florence had produced altarpieces in which central images were surrounded by roundels containing busts of the saints. For instance, in Duccio’s *Rucellai Madonna* (ca. 1285), made for the chapel of the Laudesi confraternity in the Florentine church of Sta. Maria Novella, the image of the Virgin in the center is “framed, commented on, and mediated by a carefully planned and meticulously executed programme” of roundels containing busts of saints of interest to the Dominican friars in whose church the painting was placed.<sup>47</sup> Simone Martini adapted this design in his frescoed *Maestà* for the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, in which, as Andrew Martindale observed, it looked as though “the main panel of Duccio’s *Maestà* had been surrounded by the frame of his *Rucellai Madonna*.”<sup>48</sup>

As noted above, the formal characteristics of the Sienese reliquary tabernacles suggest clear functional links with such Sienese metalwork reliquaries as the lost one originally for San Galgano. This is especially so in the case of the single-panel tabernacles, such as the processional tabernacle by Naddo Ceccarelli in Baltimore and the Cleveland frame (Figs. 3–4). In these cases we might think of the relic tabernacles as being primarily reliquaries, embellished with paintings on panel or gilded glass but always displaying the relics to view. But what about the diptychs and triptychs, such as the one in London? Are we to think of those in the same way, or are they perhaps more accurately considered devotional paintings embellished with relics?

The form of small-scale portable painted diptychs and triptychs had begun to develop in the thirteenth century and became extremely popular in central Italy as private, personal, or portable devotional objects. Victor Schmidt suggests that small-scale painted panels featuring the enthroned or half-length Madonna are “versions ‘en miniature’” of monumental panel paintings.<sup>49</sup> He cites a number of surviving examples of small-scale panel paintings that, he argues, were commissioned as miniature versions of larger compositions.<sup>50</sup> It could be that

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the dado spandrels and the statues of the Apostles affixed to the sides of the building strongly suggest a contemporary gold and enamel reliquary turned outside-in.” Branner, *St. Louis and the Court Style in Gothic Architecture* (London: Zwemmer, 1965), 57.

45. A number of authors have taken advantage of this rhetorical pairing of “bones and stones.” Brigitte Buettner, “From Bones to Stones: Reflections on Jeweled Reliquaries,” in *Reliquiare im Mittelalter*, ed. Bruno Reudenbach and Gia Toussaint (Berlin: Akademie, 2005), 43–59; Scott B. Montgomery, “Golden Flesh, Radiant Bones: The Unity of Relic and Reliquary in Medieval Perception,” in *The Interrelationship of Relics and Images in Christian and Buddhist Culture*, ed. Akira Akiyama and Kana Tomizawa (Tokyo: Global COE Program DALS, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo, 2009), 59–75; Cara Krmpotich, Joost Fontein, and John Harries, “The Substance of Bones: The Emotive Materiality and Affective Presence of Human Remains,” *Journal of Material Culture* 15, no. 4 (2010): 371–84; and Scott B. Montgomery, “Bones and Stones: Imaging Sacred Defense in Medieval Cologne,” in *Push Me, Pull You*, vol. 1, *Imaginative and Emotional Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 561–93.

46. Buettner, “From Bones to Stones,” 43–46.

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47. Joanna Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 83, fig. 68.

48. Martindale, *Simone Martini*, 14, fig. 2.

49. Schmidt, *Painted Piety*, 183.

50. These include Duccio’s so-called *Bern Maestà* in the Kunstmuseum, Bern, which Schmidt links with the fragmentary Madonna attributed to the Master of San Quirico at the Museo d’arte sacra della Val d’Arbia, Buonconvento, and the panel by the Master of St. Cecilia, in the Szépművészeti Múzeum, Budapest, which seems to be a version of the large-scale panel by the same painter in the Oratorio di Sta. Maria Maddalena in Pian di Mugnone. *Ibid.*, 188–91, figs. 128–31.

the combination of painted imagery on the London triptych can be seen in a similar way in relation to Siena Cathedral's St. Ansanus altarpiece, though perhaps not so much attempting to reproduce the large painting on a small scale as to evoke or recall it (Figs. 1 and 6). The London triptych is not a reproduction of the cathedral altarpiece: as already noted, its formal composition is quite different, with the Annunciation placed in the wings rather than in the central panel and Ansanus at the apex of the central panel instead of on the side.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the addition of the ivories and the relics makes the London triptych in some ways a wholly different kind of object, a much more complex ensemble. Nonetheless, the iconographic combination of the Annunciation and the young patron saint, Ansanus, would surely evoke the Siena Cathedral altarpiece of 1333 for any inhabitant of Siena after that date.

More important, the precise material characteristics of these tabernacles indicate that they are not small-scale versions of altarpieces; instead, they can more accurately be understood as small-scale versions of the relic-image ensemble of the altar itself. They incorporate relics, such as would have been inside an altar, and paintings, such as would have been on top of an altar. We should think of the reliquary tabernacles, then, as reliquaries with paintings, or paintings with relics, with slightly different receptions and understandings in each case depending on their precise forms or their different viewers and users.

### *The London Triptych: The Ivory Panels*

There is even more to the London triptych than this rich and complex relic-painting nexus. As we have seen, this exceptional object is unique even within this extraordinary group of painted tabernacles. The maker of the work added low-relief ivory carving to the painted and gilded decoration seen in other examples of the type (Fig. 11). The two ivories embedded in the central panel are probably roughly contemporary with, or a little earlier than, the painted triptych. Freuler judged them to be French, as did the Christie's sale catalogue.<sup>52</sup> De Torquat weighed the possibility that they might have been produced in Italy, perhaps by an artist traveling from north of the Alps. She wondered whether they could even have been made by an Italian attempting to emulate some of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century French ivories that had entered collections and treasuries in Italy during the fourteenth century. However,

51. St. Margaret, who was included in the Siena Cathedral altarpiece largely for reasons of visual balance, is much less important a saint in the Sienese context and can be easily dispensed with in this alternative arrangement.

52. Freuler, *Bartolo di Fredi Cini*, 506–7; and Christie's, *Old Master Pictures*, 95.

she, too, eventually decided that they are French.<sup>53</sup> Carved ivory diptychs became increasingly valued beginning in the second half of the thirteenth century. Many of the highest quality and most highly prized of the early ivories imported into Italy seem to have emanated from France, especially from Paris.<sup>54</sup> Raymond Koechlin's seminal study of Gothic ivories, published in 1924, assumed that nearly all such ivories were Parisian productions,<sup>55</sup> but since then several studies have challenged, and nuanced, the assumption of Parisian dominance.<sup>56</sup> The precise place of origin of the London triptych's ivories is still an open question.<sup>57</sup>

The ivories retain traces of polychromy on the background, in the inner folds of the figures' garments and headgear, and in the tiny rivulets of blood that flow from the wounds of Christ.<sup>58</sup> As yet it is impossible to ascertain technically the date of the polychromy, but it seems likely that only a very small amount of it would have been original to the ivories when they were produced.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps the traces of gilding on the gifts of the kings and the headgear and clothing of the figures on the far right of the Crucifixion panel might be original, but the gilding and red paint that "frame" the two ivory panels and overlie the crockets above the arches at the top of each one are almost certain to have been added later. A curious difference of treatment is evident in this "framing" paint: at the bottom edges of the inserted ivories, the artist continued the red paint along the bottom

53. De Torquat, "Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary," 20.

54. Such as the *Seated Virgin and Child* in the Treasury of San Francesco in Assisi, made in France at the beginning of the second third of the fourteenth century and in Assisi from at least 1370. Gothic Ivories Project at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, [http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/B498B917\\_60172eb0.html](http://www.gothicivories.courtauld.ac.uk/images/ivory/B498B917_60172eb0.html); and Rosalia Bonito Fanelli et al., *Il Tesoro della Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi* (Assisi: Casa Editrice Franciscana, 1980), 147–48, figs. 113–14, pls. CLXXXVIII–CLXXXIX, no. 88.

55. Raymond Koechlin, *Les ivoires gothiques français* (Paris: Picard, 1924).

56. Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, *Ivoires du Moyen Âge* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1978); Charles T. Little, "Ivoires et art gothique," *Revue de l'art* 46 (1979): 58–67; and idem, "Gothic Ivory Carving in Germany," in *Images in Ivory: Precious Objects of the Gothic Age*, ed. Peter Barnet (Detroit: Detroit Institute of Arts, 1997), 80–92.

57. The ivories can possibly be linked with reliefs made in Cologne or the Rhineland, although a stylistic comparison with material attributed to Rhineland workshops is not entirely straightforward because of the difficulty of attributing regional stylistic characteristics to Gothic ivories in the first place.

58. De Torquat ("Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary," 5) thought it unlikely that this paint was original, suggesting that it would not have survived so long if it were.

59. On polychroming of ivories, see Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, "The Polychrome Decoration of Gothic Ivories," in Barnet, *Images in Ivory*, 46–61.





Figure 11. Adoration of the Magi and the Crucifixion, *interior ivory panels, fourteenth century, each 10.3 × 6.2 cm, in Bartolo di Fredi, Reliquary Triptych with the Annunciation, St. Ansanus, Adoration of the Magi, and the Crucifixion, ca. 1370, private collection, London (photo: author).*

frames, right up to the edge of the side framing elements, unifying the two panels. At the top of the ivories, however, the paint reaches the edge of the side framing elements and continues down along the inside edge of the frame of each panel, until the red paint meets the crocketed edge of the ivory arches above the narrative scenes. The paint representing the blood dripping from Christ's wounds looks most unusual in the context of ivories of this date, but not so unusual in the context of contemporary panel-painting conventions.<sup>60</sup> It may be that the rivulets of blood were added (perhaps along with the framing paint?) at the time that the triptych was put together, possibly by Bartolo di Fredi himself.

No trace of any hinge or hinging mechanism appears to survive on the inside edges of the ivory panels; they are said to have always been two separate leaves, rather than once

having been joined as a diptych.<sup>61</sup> It is possible, though, that the panels could have been fixed together with glued parchment, as in a carved ivory devotional booklet in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.<sup>62</sup> Freuler suggests that the ivories might have been added to the central panel of the triptych to cover a damaged lower part of a standing saint,<sup>63</sup> but this seems unlikely if he means that the current half-length image of the saint at the apex of the triptych was once a full-length depiction whose lower part was damaged and covered by the ivories. No other example of these early Sienese reliquary tabernacles has a standing saint at its center (apart from the Virgin Mary), with the exception of Lippo Vanni's triptych in the Vatican Pinacoteca that depicts St. Dominic

60. E.g., the double-sided panel by Francesco di Vannuccio in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, *Crucifixion with St. Augustine and an Augustinian Friar* (front) and *Virgin and Child Enthroned with Two Saints and an Augustinian Friar* (back). Schmidt, *Painted Piety*, 128, fig. 81.

61. De Torquat, "Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary," 14.

62. Victoria and Albert Museum, 11-1872, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O92726/devotional-booklet-devotional-booklet-unknown/>. See also Barnet, *Images in Ivory*, 193–97; and De Torquat, "Fourteenth-Century Painted Reliquary," 14.

63. Freuler, *Bartolo di Fredi Cini*, 506–7.

flanked by SS. Peter Martyr and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>64</sup> It seems more likely that the triptych was meant from the start to house these ivories in the lower central field. It might be significant that, at only 35.5 centimeters tall, the London triptych is quite a bit smaller than many of the other Sienese reliquary tabernacles.<sup>65</sup> The dimensions of the London triptych, compared with even the smallest of the rest of the group, probably indicate that the scale of the triptych was determined by that of the ivory tablets, and the figure of Ansanus was painted at the largest size possible in order to be shown at half length, with his attributes of book and palm, and still be legible. To achieve the greatest practicable size and legibility for the saint, he was placed as high up in the apex as possible; his halo overlaps the tooling in the gold at the edges of the triangular field and is cut off by the inner edge of the frame that houses the relic cavities. It should be noted that the right edge of the Crucifixion panel may have been cut down slightly (perhaps by as much as 4 mm, judging by the width of the left edge of that panel). This might suggest to some that the ivories were added later. However, the diminutive size of the London triptych, relative to other similar Sienese tabernacles, signals that the designer had the ivories in mind as an integral part of the triptych's fabric from the start, and that any trimming was done in order to fit them perfectly into the wooden frame.

One more aspect of the ivory panels' appearance and their possible desired function and reception needs to be considered. Although they seem in part to evoke doors, such as the interior doors of triptychs that enclose other triptychs (such as the famous Stavelot triptych, now in New York, or the so-called Andrews diptych at the Victoria and Albert Museum),<sup>66</sup> it is hard to see any way that the ivories could have functioned meaningfully as doors in this particular tabernacle in London. It could be speculated that they were placed over a cavity in the middle of the central panel, in effect to seal it up, but the recession of the ivories in the trip-

tych's central section, the depth of the triptych itself, and the likely depth of the ivory panels do not allow for much of a hidden compartment. Without secure information about patronage, provenance, or function, it is difficult to be certain about the original motivation for placing the two pieces of carved ivory in the center of the London triptych.

The many questions about the original intentions for the design of the triptych can probably never be answered fully. Yet despite all the uncertainties surrounding the incorporation of the ivories, it is instructive to consider the different concepts that the patron and/or artist might have had in mind in making the object and to examine the ways it relates both to other tabernacles and to other types of objects. Reflecting on the formal, visual, and material similarities and differences between these reliquary tabernacles and other forms of visual and material culture allows us to speculate about the various connotations that the tabernacles conjured, the functions that they might have fulfilled, and the reactions that they may have engendered in their users. What potential connotations and associations might have been available to the unknown user of this triptych?

The designer might have been striving for material variety in the creation of this multimedia object; thus, adding an ivory diptych to the painted triptych form might have had primarily aesthetic motives. Or perhaps the ivories were inserted by virtue of their perceived inherent preciousness. Then again, it might be that they were valued not so much for their own aesthetic or material characteristics as for their association with an important person: they might have been owned by someone who was valued by the patron, or by a community—religious or lay—to which the patron belonged.<sup>67</sup> They might even have been thought of as a kind of relic in their own right, because of their previous ownership. Whatever the reason for the incorporation of the ivories, they seem to have been intended to be part of the ensemble from the start and to have been enhanced by the triptych into which they were placed or even, we might say, enshrined.

The opening and closing form of the triptych already creates an impression of significance for the object or image in the center, which is revealed by the manipulation of the wings. The inclusion of ivory tablets here privatizes the experience of viewing the carved reliefs and probably reserved the experience largely for the owner of the triptych. The reliefs offer an invitation to the sense of touch, an inducement to make physical contact with the ivory—an engagement even more private and individual than looking. At the same time, the ivories lend a further visual and material cachet to the triptych.

64. Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca, 40224. Sheri Shaneyfelt, entry in *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Trinita Kennedy (Nashville: Frist Center for the Visual Arts, 2014), 153–54, cat. no. 28.

65. The heights of several of these tabernacles are as follows: Cleveland (Fig. 4), 63.5 cm; New York and Settignano, 61.3 cm; Lippo Vanni, Baltimore (Fig. 9), 49.4 cm; Naddo Ceccarelli, Baltimore (Fig. 3), 62.1 cm; and Montepulciano, 54 cm.

66. Stavelot: gold and enamel triptych, twelfth century, incorporating two smaller Byzantine reliquary triptychs of the True Cross, The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, B3 002 C, <http://www.themorgan.org/collection/paintings-and-art-objects/object/93248>. Andrews: ivory diptych, probably Carolingian, converted into doors for a tabernacle or shrine in the twelfth century, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, A.47&A-1926, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O94187/the-andrews-diptych-diptych-unknown/>.

67. John Lowden, in a personal communication, suggested that they might previously have functioned as writing tablets.

## The Materiality of Ivory

The ivories provide material variety and luxury. They invite tactile as well as visual engagement, and they provide an opportunity to consider the many manifestations of the Word in this triptych. In addition, they might also have given the object an extra, materially inflected charge because of the connotations of ivory itself. As is often noted in scholarly treatments of ivory statues of the Virgin, ivory was understood as a suitable material for representing the Mother of God because its white color stood for the Virgin's purity.<sup>68</sup> Undoubtedly, this could form one strand of the connotations of that material, but the perceived suitability of ivory as a medium for representing the Virgin gained an extra layer of meaning because of the material and ethical status of ivory itself.

The ivory used for such carvings from the mid-thirteenth century onward came primarily from the tusks of the African savanna elephant. The elephant was regarded, in several medieval exegetical and intellectual traditions, as an especially chaste animal, renowned for its sexual continence. Much in these traditions ultimately goes back to Pliny the Elder's *Historia naturalis*, written in the first century CE. Pliny starts book 8, on the animals, with the elephant, and he devotes twelve chapters to the beast. Among the properties and habits of the elephant most frequently repeated in medieval texts were references to its cool-bloodedness and its chaste sexual habits, qualities that were often presented as physiologically linked. Medieval exegetical and biblical commentators focused on the chastity of ivory, deriving this understanding of the substance from the notion of the elephant's continence.<sup>69</sup> The medieval bestiary tradition, although it tended to concentrate on deathly battles fought between elephants and dragons, nonetheless repeated such statements about the chastity of elephants.<sup>70</sup> Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou tresor*,

a thirteenth-century French encyclopedic summary of contemporary knowledge, voices similar opinions about the elephant.<sup>71</sup> Because the creature was seen to be so unsusceptible to sexual desire, elephant ivory was itself considered to be an inherently chaste substance.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, ivory did not just symbolize chastity by its whiteness; it also embodied purity in its very material existence. It was thus a suitable material for depicting the Virgin, one of whose primary characteristics was purity.

This link between the Virgin and ivory was further bolstered by allegorical interpretations of the Throne of Solomon. Solomon's throne was made of ivory (1 Kings 10). Because Solomon was a type for Christ, the Virgin, as *Sedes sapientiae* (Throne of Wisdom), was associated with the throne.<sup>73</sup> Christ, like Solomon, would not have allowed himself to be held in the Virgin's embrace were she not chaste, like the ivory of Solomon's throne.<sup>74</sup> Therefore the Virgin herself was linked allegorically and iconographically with the Throne of Solomon and symbolically with its material. This web of connections suggests that images of the Virgin in ivory might be seen not only as representing the Virgin and symbolizing her chastity but also as physically embodying her purity, because ivory

68. E.g., William H. Monroe, "A French Gothic Ivory of the Virgin and Child," *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies* 9 (1978): 7–29.

69. For instance, Cassiodorus suggests in his commentary on the Psalms, "Let us realise that ivory signifies more than mere riches. The elephant to whom these tusks belong is said to be most chaste; among quadrupeds he is endowed with the highest intelligence, his intercourse with his mate is disciplined, and he enjoys no second spouse." P. G. Walsh, trans., *Cassiodorus: Explanation of the Psalms* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 1:446. This is in reference to Psalm 44:9–10: "Myrrh and stacte and cassia perfume thy garments, from the ivory houses out of which the daughters of kings have delighted thee in thy glory" (Douay-Rheims ed.)

70. The typical text on the elephant in medieval Latin bestiaries begins, "There is an animal, which is called 'elephant,' which possesses no desire for sexual intercourse." George C. Druce, "The Elephant in Medieval Legend and Art," *Journal of the Royal Archaeological Institute* 76 (1919): 1–73, at 6.

71. "[T]hey are so chaste that there is no fighting over females, but rather each elephant has its own mate to which it remains attached its whole life long, and if the male loses his mate or the female hers, they never link up with another, but instead they always go alone through the wilderness. Because sexual desire is not so overpowering in them as to move them to copulate as the other animals do, it happens that, moved by nature, the couple goes to the east beyond the earthly paradise until the female finds an herb called mandrake and eats it, and she excites the male so much that he eats some too, and then each one's desire is stimulated, and they copulate backwards, and they produce one single offspring; and this happens only once in their whole lives." *Li livres dou tresor* 187.5–6; Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure*, trans. Paul Barrette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York: Garland, 1993), 137.

72. Sarah M. Guérin, "Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine," *Art Bulletin* 95, no. 1 (2013): 53–77, at 62.

73. Daniel H. Weiss, "Architectural Symbolism and the Decoration of the Ste.-Chapelle," *Art Bulletin* 77, no. 2 (1995): 308–20, at 313.

74. "The wisdom of God the Father . . . that is Solomon, made for himself a throne of ivory, that is the seat in the Virgin, because he would not be placed in anything unchaste" (*Sapientia Dei Patris . . . ipsa est Salomon, quae thronum de ebore sibi facit, dum sedem in Virgine, qua nil unquam fuit castius, sibi ponit*). Guibert of Nogent, *Liber de Laude Sanctae Mariae* 3, in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Garnier, 1853), 156: col. 542A. Quoted in Guérin, "Meaningful Spectacles," 62; and Ilene Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 24–25.



was inherently pure.<sup>75</sup> In this way, a representation of the Virgin in ivory could be understood actually to make her, or one very important attribute of her, physically present.

This offered an important possibility to the maker of the London triptych. The Virgin did not die an ordinary death like other mortals but was assumed into heaven and therefore left no bodily relics (the only relics were those of her milk and her clothing). Here, though, because the ivory in the center could be seen as embodying purity, one of the Virgin's most essential characteristics, a viewer of this triptych might think of the ivory diptych as akin to a relic of the Virgin, supplemented by the relics of the other saints arrayed around the central panel. The inserted ivory diptych allowed her to be materially present not only in the iconography of the Adoration and Crucifixion but also in the form of her purity, embodied by the chaste nature of the ivory itself.

The seemingly curious embedding of the ivory panels provides further material and symbolic heft to the triptych's already complex web of iconographic references to the Virgin. The carved scenes on the ivories represent the narrative events of the episodes depicted, but they also collectively convey the nature and identity of Mary more broadly in the drama of human salvation. In addition, by its embedding of ivory into the panel, the triptych is actually enabled to *embody* purity—to make it physically and materially present—through the ivory. When that material embodiment of chastity is combined with the iconographic representation of the Virgin at the Annunciation, the Virgin and Child at the Adoration of the Magi, and the Virgin as the mother of the adult crucified Christ, her overall significance and her attributes are presented in a rich and complex manner. The triptych thus provided a multivalent and pleasing set of allusions to the Virgin, communicated by visual and material means and in direct and allusive ways. In doing so, it made visible a particular set of concerns present in the Sienese cultural milieu in which this set of painted relic tabernacles emerged. These include relationships among different visual media and the devotional and theological potential of those media.

### Materials and Devotion

The intriguing variety of materials and media in the London triptych seems to offer an additional set of devotional possibilities. By the twelfth century, as is well known, images and objects were being used alongside or instead of sacred or devotional texts in a process that has been called *visio di-*

*vina*.<sup>76</sup> This term recognizes the relationship to, and departure from, the process of monastic *lectio divina* (spiritual reading). Multiple types of *visio divina* were practiced in the fourteenth century, but common to most approaches was a progressive aspect:<sup>77</sup> devotees were encouraged to move from the contemplation of material images and worldly beauty to an imaginative realm, and thence to what certain theologians, including Bernard of Clairvaux, considered the highest stratum of devotional experience, beyond the need for any kind of image.<sup>78</sup>

The Franciscan mystic Ugo Panziera's *Treatise on Perfection*, written about 1320, offers a treatment of devotional practice that uses metaphors from visual art objects:

In the first moment when the mind begins to think about Christ, Christ seems written in the mind and in the imagination; in the second, Christ seems to have been sketched; in the third, he seems to have been underdrawn and underpainted; in the fourth, he seems to have been colored, and his flesh to have been painted; in the fifth he seems incarnate and *rilevato*.<sup>79</sup>

As Lars Jones points out, the significance of this passage turns on the polysemic word *rilevato*, which can refer both to relief, such as *rilevare di gesso* (gesso relief), seen widely in trecento paintings and mentioned by Cennino Cennini, but also to "lifted" or "raised up," and therefore "resurrected."<sup>80</sup> Although it would go beyond the evidence to claim that the composition

76. Lars R. Jones, "Visio Divina? Donor Figures and Representations of Imagistic Devotion: The Copy of the 'Virgin of Bagnolo' in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2002), 44.

77. It has been noted by many scholars that actual practices of devotion were often at odds with, or at least bore complex relations to, the essentially monastic "professional" theories. See, e.g., Alexa Sand, "Vision, Devotion, and Difficulty in the Psalter Hours 'of Yolande of Soissons,'" *Art Bulletin* 87, no. 1 (2005): 6–23.

78. Sixten Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety," *Gazette des beaux-arts*, ser. 6, 73 (1969): 159–70; Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); and Bret L. Rothstein, *Sight and Spirituality in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 2, "The Imagination of Imagelessness."

79. Jones, "Visio Divina?," 30–55, at 44, translation by Jones. See also David Summers, *The Judgment of Sense: Renaissance Naturalism and the Rise of Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 313–14.

80. Jones, "Visio Divina?," 44.

75. Guérin ("Meaningful Spectacles," 63–64) explains that the chasteness of ivory also made it suitable as a material for pyxes, to store the Eucharist.

of the London triptych was directly inspired by this text,<sup>81</sup> it may be that we see in its mixed materiality similar sorts of devotional currents.<sup>82</sup> But were the ivories necessarily the end point of the devotional process, as Panziera's *rilevato* image was? Ultimately, one should aim to reach devotional contact with the divine *without* images; this was widely understood to be the higher form of devotion, with images being a prop for those with less acute devotional skills.<sup>83</sup> So how would an early viewer of the London triptych have seen the ivory reliefs in relation to the painted images? Might they have seemed more real than the painted ones because of their three-dimensional quality, or less real because of their lack of color? Either way, these contrasts could have encouraged viewers to think about levels of reality and about the place of images in devotion. In so doing, the visual and material contrasts provided a range of possibilities for a progressive route that can be traced through the triptych's images and materials during the devotional process.

### Viewing Trajectories

We can propose a number of viewing patterns or trajectories that a user of the triptych could take around its various sections. One might undertake a visual and contemplative progression following the chronological order of the narratives, starting with the Annunciation in the wings, moving through the Adoration of the Magi in the left ivory, and ending with the Crucifixion in the right ivory—all watched over by St. Ansanus and surrounded by the relics of other saints.

81. Panziera was a native of Prato who entered the Franciscan order and died having served in its eastern Mediterranean missions. San Bernardino of Siena was aware of his works in the early fifteenth century and annotated a copy of his *Trattati* (Siena, Biblioteca comunale, Cod. 1.11.15). Franco Mormando, "An Early Renaissance Guide for the Perplexed: Bernardino of Siena's *De inspirationibus*," in *Through a Glass Darkly: Essays in the Religious Imagination*, ed. John C. Hawley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996), 24–49, at 28.

82. Christopher R. Lakey links the Chiarito Tabernacle, a triptych with a gilded-gesso relief in the center, by the Florentine artist Pacino di Bonaguida, with this text by Panziera. Lakey, "The Materiality of Light in Medieval Italian Painting," in "Medieval Materiality," ed. Anne E. Lester and Katherine C. Little, special issue, *English Language Notes* 53, no. 2 (2015): 119–36.

83. Geraldine A. Johnson makes a relevant point in relation to fifteenth-century Italian reliefs of the Virgin and Child: more highly colored images would primarily have encouraged corporeal meditation; monochromatic images "would seem to be designed for more sophisticated viewers interested in achieving the higher levels of contemplation." Johnson, "Art or Artefact? Madonna and Child Reliefs in the Early Renaissance," in *The Sculpted Object, 1400–1700*, ed. Stuart Currie and Peta Motture (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), 1–24, at 6. I am grateful to Peter Dent for this suggestion and for bringing this work and that of Lars Jones to my attention.

Such a narrative-driven path would be complemented by a process of working through the various images and materials presented in the triptych in terms of levels of reality. In this case, one could start with the painted representations, the Annunciation and the figure of St. Ansanus, which situate the viewer in the familiar world of Siena by evoking the well-known altarpiece of St. Ansanus in the cathedral (Fig. 6), to which the painted features of this triptych might be seen to refer iconographically. Moving toward the center of the triptych, the viewer encounters a set of sculpted, monochrome reliefs that, by their simultaneously more and less real nature, disrupt the progressive contemplation of images and encourage him or her to move further away from the real world of manufactured imagery toward the goal of seeing pictures only in the mind. The ivories take the viewer beyond that real world of depictions, in which actual material, painted images in a known physical context in trecento Siena are recalled, into the more complex devotional landscape evoked by the contrast between colored paintings and monochrome reliefs.

What of the other type of physical matter once presented here, the relics? In the course of moving inward from fully painted depictions in the wings toward the central monochrome ivories, the viewer must confront—indeed, must pass over—the relics. They stand beyond, or beside, the visual rhetoric about real and unreal, sculpted and painted, monochrome and color. The relics provide a prompt toward more direct and unmediated contemplation of the holy figures that they both represent and embody. They exist in a liminal space between the realm of worldly, material images in the triptych and the nonmaterial realm of heaven where Christ and the saints dwell. The material remains of the saints at the edges of the central panel of the triptych evoke the precious jewels with which more traditional forms of reliquaries were encrusted, but at the same time, they act as a link between the sublunary, material world in which the mortal viewer dwells, alongside these material remains of the saints, and the superlunary, heavenly world, where the saints also, at the same time, dwell eternally alongside Christ and the Virgin.

In the Sienese tabernacles, then, concepts of materiality, variety, reality and nonreality, evocation and transformation are all pressed into service. Viewers gazed on the artful representation of precious metalwork and jewels in the form of gilded and painted wood, glass, and other embellishments. These were all displayed alongside the visually unattractive relics that were now visible on the surface rather than hidden away inside a precious metalwork reliquary. Confronted with the whole ensemble of media and materials in the London triptych, a viewer was very likely encouraged to think widely about the relationships among visuality, materiality, and reality. The contrasts are not just between the paintings and the carvings. The beautifully painted and carved images that

draw the viewer's eye can also be contrasted with the relics. These are the materials that look least real, in terms of their resemblance to any recognizable objects or persons, but they are in fact the most real, and most important, entities in the triptych. The painted, gilded, and carved images are beautiful and captivating, and they have spiritual value, yet they are to be valued less as a means to access the divine than the real material remains of the saints, which are visually unattractive but possessed of huge spiritual charisma. Viewers were not meant to be deceived by the precious appearance of the tabernacles but were literally supposed to see through the surface beauty of the effects created by the artist and to understand that, in seeking to move toward the divine, they should value the relics, the real heavenly treasures, not the other materials arranged so artfully and beautifully on the surfaces of the tabernacles.

### *Relics and Reliquaries in Siena*

Why was there an enthusiasm at this particular point in time, in this precise location, for this specific combination of visible relics with images? The relics were mainly combined with representations in paint, but sometimes with depictions both painted and sculpted, as in the London triptych, or with images in gilded glass, as in the reliquary tabernacles most prevalent in Umbria.<sup>84</sup> Relics were increasingly acquired and displayed in mid-thirteenth-century Siena. Indeed, the hospital of Sta. Maria della Scala purchased a large collection of relics from Byzantium in 1359.<sup>85</sup> Stefania Gerevini argues that these relics became a sort of Sienese "civic" collection, as the *ospedale* was in all senses a public institution.<sup>86</sup> Siena's government financed the transfer of the relics and commissioned the rector of the Opera del Duomo, the head of the cathedral's administration, to build a chapel to store them.<sup>87</sup> Thus, three major civic bodies—the government, the Opera del Duomo, and the administration of the hospital—were involved in bringing these relics to prominence in Siena during those years. The relics, in splendid reliquaries, were displayed annually on the feast of

the Annunciation, 25 March, in a ceremony that was attended by Siena's most prominent government officials, and this feast became a major liturgical and civic event in the 1360s and 1370s.<sup>88</sup> In the years after the relics came to Siena, several alterations were made to the fabric of the hospital's facade, including the building of a pulpit for exhibiting the relics, and to the piazza in front of it, to further facilitate and dignify the staging of this event (Fig. 12).<sup>89</sup>

The unusual visual prominence of the Annunciation in the London triptych suggests that it might have been commissioned by someone who was not only keen to have an image that resonated with a famous altarpiece in the Duomo but was also interested in the cult of relics being fostered in connection with the collection at Sta. Maria della Scala. In placing the image of the Annunciation inside a triptych that facilitated the display of a collection of relics, the owner may have been inspired by the relic cult in Siena during these years, including the lavish festivities around the display of the collection belonging to the hospital on 25 March. Even before the large number of Byzantine relics was purchased, the hospital possessed its own collection, and high-ranking members of the hospital were interested in the particular combination of image and relic offered by these reliquary tabernacles. As noted above, the earliest dated example of the group, the Cleveland frame (Fig. 4), was made in 1347 for Mino di Cino Cinughi, who was rector of Sta. Maria della Scala from 1340 until his death in 1351. Other tabernacles by Sienese painters, possibly for Sienese patrons, may have been commissioned to hold relics that were in the possession of the hospital before it acquired the large collection in 1359, including the once double-sided tabernacle attributed to Pietro Lorenzetti and now split between New York and Settignano.<sup>90</sup> This artist is not documented after 1348, and he is widely assumed to have died in the outbreak of the Black Death in that year, so the tabernacle attributed to him is likely to have been produced in the 1340s. Naddo Ceccarelli, the painter of the single-panel tabernacle in Baltimore (Fig. 3), is normally thought to have been active between 1330 and 1360, and that work is usually dated about 1350. Other Sienese reliquary tabernacles, however, such as the one in Siena attributed to Francesco di Vannuccio,<sup>91</sup> or

84. Gordon, "Mass Production of Franciscan Piety."

85. Stefania Gerevini, "Objects, Treasures, Cities: The Importation and Appropriation of Byzantine Artworks and Relics in Santa Maria della Scala in Siena and in San Marco in Venice in the Fourteenth Century" (PhD diss., Courtauld Institute of Art, 2010), 59–70.

86. *Ibid.*, 18.

87. Wolfgang Loseries, "Presentation of Relics in Late Medieval Siena: The Cappella delle Reliquie in Siena Cathedral," in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, ed. James Robinson and Lloyd de Beer with Anna Harnden (London: British Museum, 2014), 56–65, at 56.

88. For the reliquaries themselves, see Luciano Bellosi, ed., *L'oro di Siena: il Tesoro di Santa Maria della Scala* (Milan: Skira, 1996).

89. Gerevini, "Objects, Treasures, Cities," 59, 67.

90. Federico Zeri, "Reconstruction of a Two-Sided Reliquary Panel by Pietro Lorenzetti," *Burlington Magazine* 95, no. 604 (1953): 244–45; Preising, "Bild und Reliquie," 57–58; and Carl Brandon Strehlke and Machtelt Brüggem Israëls, eds., *The Bernard and Mary Berenson Collection of European Paintings at I Tatti* (Florence: Villa I Tatti in collaboration with Officina Libraria, 2015), 374–78.

91. Fondazione del Monte dei Paschi di Siena, FMPS 10155 (2642). Preising, "Bild und Reliquie," 58–59, no. 17. When Preising was writ-





Figure 12. *Piazza del Duomo, Siena, with Sta. Maria della Scala (left) and the facade of the cathedral (right) (photo: Gavin Wiens). See the electronic edition of Gesta for a color version of this image.*

that in Montepulciano attributed to Francesco di Vannuccio or Cristoforo di Bindoccio, are probably to be dated about 1380–90, and the London triptych, as discussed earlier, sits most happily around 1370. These tabernacles were presumably commissioned at a time when the cult of the hospital’s relics, and their display on the feast of the Annunciation, had already become an important part of Siena’s religious and devotional culture.

No one who attended the Annunciation celebrations at Sta. Maria della Scala would have been unaware of the visual and material culture associated with the cathedral. The hospital faced the cathedral’s western facade, and the Sienese municipal government controlled both institutions (Fig. 12). New and prestigious projects in the cathedral during the 1330s and 1340s—the period just before the emergence of this new type of reliquary tabernacle in Siena—included the translation of the relics of the patron saints into new altars in the east end of the cathedral, with new altarpieces that linked images of the Virgin with those saints. These comprised not only Simone Martini’s St. Ansanus/Annunciation altarpiece of 1333 (Fig. 6) but also the St. Sabinus/Birth of the Virgin altarpiece by Pietro

Lorenzetti; the St. Crescentius/Purification of the Virgin altarpiece by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (both installed in 1342); and the St. Victor/Nativity altarpiece by Bartolomeo Bulgarini and the Palazzo Venezia Master (ca. 1350).<sup>92</sup> The visual culture of the cathedral was closely linked with the hospital, and awareness of the images and artifacts associated with each would have been well known to all Sienese citizens. The Virgin was patron of the hospital as well as the cathedral. Therefore, it seems likely that the London triptych was commissioned at a time when the long-standing religious culture centered on images of the Virgin—especially images that connected the Virgin with the patron saints of Siena, such as the cathedral’s patronal altarpieces, Duccio’s *Maestà*, Simone Martini’s *Maestà*, and the stained-glass east window of the cathedral—had been given a new fillip with the cult of Sta. Maria della Scala’s relic collection.

Juxtaposing relics of the saints with painted images in tabernacles like the one in London allows for a consideration of levels and varieties of reality: the painted images look real, but are unreal; the relics, which do not project any kind of visual likeness of the saints, are, in fact, real instances of material presence. The London triptych, with its inserted ivory panels, painted imagery, and relics, is a unique survival among Italian reliquary tabernacles. Its range of artistic media and the juxtaposition of material remains of the saints alongside painted images of holy figures allow for a devotional journey that moves around the triptych, from full-color images to largely monochrome depictions, from flat pictures to relief carving, and from the margins to the center and back out again. Ultimately, and paradoxically, the most important element in this triptych—the relics of the saints—can be found in the frame of the main image rather than at the very center. The most captivating elements—the painted, gilded, and carved images—are intended to be valued far less than the unprepossessing relics. The triptych thus participates in a visual dialogue about material and materiality, about relationships among different types of medium and matter, and about different levels of reality. It also attests to the sustained importance of the material presence, as well as visibility, of the physical remains of the saints in the midst of the shifting dynamics of reliquary design and use in late medieval Italy.

ing, the tabernacle was on display at The Cloisters in New York. It was sold at Sotheby’s, New York, 28 January 2010, lot 46. See also Andrea De Marchi, “Francesco di Vannuccio (Siena, documentato dal 1356 al 1389),” in Seidel, *Le arti a Siena nel primo Rinascimento*, 362.

92. Diana Norman, *Siena and the Virgin: Art and Politics in a Late Medieval City State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), chap. 4, “The Patronal Altars,” 67–85; and H. W. van Os, *Sienese Altarpieces, 1215–1460: Form, Content, Function*, vol. 1, 1215–1344 (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1988), chap. 5.